

The Truth About England . . .
Headlam

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THE TRUTH ABOUT ENGLAND

EXPOSED IN A

LETTER TO A NEUTRAL.

BY

J. W. HEADLAM, M.A.

Author of "The History of Twelve Days,"
"England, Germany and Europe," &c.

THOMAS NELSON & SONS,

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THE TRUTH ABOUT ENGLAND

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I.

DEAR M. DE B—,

You tell me that there are doubts and misgivings among your friends as to England; they compare the part she has taken in the war with that of France and Russia, they question whether she is doing her full share; they suggest that, perhaps, she is not after all throwing herself into the struggle with all her strength, whether she may not be "taking it easy." And what they hear from those who have been among us, and especially what they gather from the study of those of our newspapers which have the greatest currency among you, goes not a little way to confirm this apprehension. These do not seem to tell of a nation satisfied in the complete occupation with one great task. "How different" (they say) "from what we see in France and hear of from Germany; there the voice of faction and contention is silent, the whole tide of national activity flows with a strong and steady flood; with you it seems that it is not so, else why these constant exhortations to the Government? Why this criticism of your own achievements? Why these mutual recriminations?" "Is not this," you say, "a sign that you yourselves are not satisfied with what you are doing, how then can it be expected that other nations will be satisfied?"

Yes, it is true. We are not satisfied. But believe me this is not because we have done little, but because nothing that we could do would satisfy us. There is in our nation a spirit of jealous and unbounded ambition. We are unwilling to be surpassed by others, even by our best friends, and when we have undertaken a business we acquiesce in nothing short of completion and perfection. And, indeed, when I think of all that is at stake, the security of our own shores, the existence of that Empire which so many have lived and died to build, the welfare of France, the saving of Servia, and the restoration of Belgium—nay, the welfare and happiness of the human race itself—then I can put no limit on that to which our desires call us, and I know how all that we have done falls short of this; but the defect, let me assure you, if defect there be, lies not in our will but in our power; all that we have of wealth, of intelligence and skill and, above all, of blood and life has been freely thrown into the common cause.

If other nations do not understand this, the cause is that they do not understand, as why should they, our political customs and our governmental machinery. Here you will seek in vain for that silent self-surrender which, from the moment when the hour of danger came, in France as in Germany enabled the great organ of the administration to call each man and woman to his appointed duty. It may be a better way, it is not our way. We have in truth no government, no administration. It is the nature of English liberty that it offers to the State and nation not willing submission but energetic co-operation.

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This co-operation is voluntary and free; it is not ordered but arranged; it is given only when there is full knowledge and understanding, and this cannot be secured except by the fullest discussion in Parliament and the press. In this free discussion, which is the breath of our life, each individual claims the right of offering his advice and criticism on each detail of government, whether it be the raising of taxes, the enlistment of recruits, the clothing of soldiers, or the conduct of a campaign. With us, silence would mean apathy; clamour and discussion are a sign of activity. Hence this argument, this controversy, these parties and dissensions of which you hear so much; this criticism of the Government, this constant cry that they should be doing this or that. Believe me, these are not signs of hesitation or uncertainty or backsliding; this eager controversy is a necessary preliminary to well-considered action. If there be a difficulty it is not hidden away and suppressed; as soon as any impediment to the vigorous execution of the national will is discovered, a thousand voices are heard; they concentrate attention on it, by so doing for the moment they exaggerate it, and in the eager search for a remedy they give undue importance to what is often merely a partial and temporary obstacle.

It is quite possible, therefore, that the reading of our newspapers discourages our Allies; this is to be regretted, but it cannot be avoided; they are written for our own guidance and information, and even their exaggerations and vehemence are one of the weapons that we use to achieve our results. It is a weapon we cannot do without; it is one that has always been used. If you will read the narrative of past wars you will always find the same thing—an unrestrained press, the voice of an impatient and often indignant nation, sometimes captious, sometimes querulous, but always insistent in goading on the Government whenever there was any appearance of incompetence or indifference. Then, as now, the attacks were not always just, often excessive, but then, as now, they achieved their end, and it is the end alone to which we have to look.

This cannot be better illustrated than by the whole history of the "drink" question. After a few months of war, there seemed reason to fear that excessive drinking among certain parts of the population interfered with the production of ammunition, and, perhaps, to some extent, with the training of the soldiers. What was to be done? First of all we had to find out the facts, then to discover whether there were any special causes for this evil if it existed, and, finally, to discuss the best way of removing them. Until we knew the nature and extent of the danger we could not decide on the best remedy. The truth could only be discovered if all available facts were published. The result of this was that during a period of some weeks the drink question occupied a very prominent place in the public mind; everyone who had evidence to offer quite naturally and properly hastened to contribute his personal experience to the discussion of the subject. This inevitably caused some exaggeration of the danger, and there was a time when this exaggeration brought up proposals for meeting it equally exaggerated. Voices were then heard on the other side; the matter was reduced to its proper proportions; now

the extent and nature of it has been defined and limited, and, in consequence, the best means of dealing with it have been found out; machinery for doing so has been applied and is in operation with constantly increasing stringency and with the full support of public opinion. The spread of the disease has been stopped and the united national will is being used both publicly and privately, so that we are now getting to the very heart of the evil. Now, all this could not have been achieved without the preliminary public discussion. It is quite possible that some foreigner, unacquainted with our institutions, who took up one of our newspapers some months ago might have carried away a belief that the whole nation was crippled by drinking. This was never true, but the very exaggeration which might have misled him, was merely the working of the machinery of popular government towards extirpating that small amount of excessive drinking which really existed.

II.

These considerations will be of assistance when we turn to the greater matters of military co-operation. In dealing with them also we must keep in mind this truth that if you desire to obtain a true and faithful picture of what is happening in this country you must not be guided by an exclusive attention to what you will find in one or more newspapers at any one period, for this will only give you one stage in the progress of events. If you wish to be able to form a fair judgment you must wait for the conclusion of the whole history.

There are, I suppose, two matters which have tended to make foreign observers take an unfavourable view of the whole-heartedness with which the nation has thrown itself into the war; these may be summed up in the two words "strikes" and "recruiting." While reading a German book the other day I came across the statement that a contrast between the civilisations of the two countries could well be made on a comparison between what Mr. Lloyd George has called the "Potato bread spirit" and the strike of the Welsh miners. The criticism and challenge was a fair one, and in the same way it is easy to make a contrast between the manner in which the whole manhood of France was in one moment thrown into the battle line, and the partial, embarrassed, half-organised recruiting which ever since the war began, has occupied so large a place among us. The comparison is natural, but if on these grounds the conclusion were drawn that we are half-hearted in this business, it would be profoundly untrue. We must take a broader view. We cannot ignore the vital difference between the past history and the present conditions in the different countries. In France, as in Germany, it was possible in a single moment, in the twinkling of an eye, to turn the complete efforts of the whole nation to military purposes. This was possible for two reasons: the nature of the danger and the extent of the preparations.

First of all there was not and there could not in either nation from the very first moment be, any doubt or hesitation among even the most ignorant that the safety of the soil of the Fatherland was at stake. In Germany the Russians were over the border; in fact, the whole diplomatic discussion had been

deliberately arranged by the German Government, so that they might be able to appeal to the people on this ground. It was this, and this alone, which ensured the support of almost the whole of the Social Democratic party. In France the millions of German soldiers were ready to begin their impetuous rush to Paris. With us there was not, and there could not be, any immediate sense of the presence of this overwhelming danger. Our peasants and working men had no reason to look forward to the immediate appearance of Cossacks or Uhlans in their villages and towns.

And if the immediate conditions were different, equally different were what we may call the historical antecedents and the preparations which they alone made possible. In Germany the waging of this war is the aim to which the whole organisation, not only of the military, but also of the civil institutions has been consciously directed; the sudden marshalling of the nation is the consummation of years of deliberate effort. For them it is the blossoming of the flower for which the plant has been prepared by the slow growth of past years; for us it is the violent wrenching and distortion of the whole structure of society.

In France, too, the possibility of this war had been long foreseen, and, just because it had been foreseen, the danger could be provided against, and so we have the sudden and immediate illumination, the blinding light which penetrates into the most hidden recesses. In England we have the slow and steady growth of conviction which gradually, but surely and irresistibly, has made its way week by week and month by month throughout the whole of society; all the commotion, discussion, the mutual recrimination are merely the symptoms of this growth. They are not a sign that the nation is weak-kneed, half-hearted, back-sliding, they are but a process by which the full conversion has been completed; and all the time that this mental process was taking place, the whole machinery by which the war was to be waged had to be improvised. With us, the years of preparation have been wanting, all had to be done in the very moment of crisis.

Let us for a moment consider the real contrast. In Germany for just one hundred years the whole efforts of the Prussian State has been directed to creating the nation in arms; for this is the very basis of their polity and its maintenance is the condition for the existence of the State. In France, there is a century and more of military greatness and military disaster to look back upon—France, the child of revolution, which owed its new-born greatness and its liberty to the great national effort, when Carnot called upon the manhood of the nation to defend its territory and its liberty against the allied monarchs of Europe. Then there came the years of conquest and of glory, when it could be said that *La France n'est qu'un soldat*; and the invasions of 1814 and 1815, when the lesson was taught that it was only by their own right hand that the soil of France could be protected against invasion. Again, the same lesson was taught in 1870, so that none could forget it. Much has been altered, and time has healed many scars, but this has always been remembered: year

by year, when the toll of the young was called, the conscripts, as they tore themselves from their families, knew always that the command of the Fatherland must be obeyed. For ever in Paris the veiled statue was a symbol of the fate which would overtake them if their hands became weak and their spirit faltered, and ever they heard from their father's lips the story of the time when the Prussian was in the land, and ever beyond the Eastern frontier there was growing and ever growing the imminent avalanche that threatened to pour once more over the pleasant fields of France.

In England, how different it is! We had nothing which, in the same way, had made the nation conscious that its independence and prosperity depended upon military preparation. To us the fleet has been what the army was to France. The nation has always been proud of the great deeds of its soldiers and their reckless valour in battle, but the army has stood a little apart from the main drift of national history; it has been, as it were, a by-product. Its battles have been fought far from the Mother Country and its greatest deeds often in other continents. It has belonged, as it were, to certain social classes; the rich, the aristocratic, the professional and the very poor; the great middle class and the well-to-do among the working men (and under modern conditions it is between these that the centre of gravity of the community lies) have had little part in it; to them the army has been something unknown; they had no interest in its life and traditions; to them it has been as strange and distant as is the fleet to a Frenchman from Burgundy or the Touraine. In the mountain valleys and the broad plains, where mile upon mile in an endless chain of mill and mine, stretch the great towns and clustered villages, linked by the net-work of railways and tramways, there, in the throbbing heart of modern England, the soldier was never seen.

You who have lived and travelled among military states on the continent can little realise how to us in England militarism was a completely unknown thing. It is not so much that it was disliked or dreaded, but it was non-existent. Armies and battles came to us like stories of a distant and bygone world. To this the education of the people, in religion and politics alike, had contributed; England is at heart still Puritan and their Puritanism has taken from its founders all except the army which Cromwell built up. Among the quiet, sober working classes living a life in many ways so aloof, so self-centred, this you would always have found in the past that parents, father and mother alike, would never willingly allow a son to enter the army. The religious communities which provide so much of their intellectual as well as their spiritual nurture, communities which they themselves had built up, which are not the expression of an external authority but the organ of their own beliefs, were sternly opposed to the practice of war and to the profession of arms. And on the political side their whole energies and ideas have been directed towards the struggle to win for themselves better conditions of life, a struggle in which they believed that they were fighting not only their own battles but those also of their comrades in France and in Germany. In their dream of

the future there was no place for the struggle of nations but only for the co-operation of the poor in every country to fight the common battle against wealth and power.

Never has this attitude been so pronounced as in the years immediately preceding the war. The diplomatic tension corresponded to no general popular feeling: among nine-tenths of the people, and all the working classes, that was without reserve pacifist. The only external activity that really awakened popular response was the meeting of the Hague Conference; others, more sophisticated perhaps, saw in this merely the manoeuvring of diplomatists; our people, more ingenuous, regarded it as a real step towards a better state in international relations. They had welcomed an Entente with France, they looked for an Entente with Germany. They felt no enmity to other countries; they could not understand that other nations should feel enmity to them, and their chosen guide in these matters was Norman Angell. Had you gone during the winter of 1913 to some quiet country town, some working-man's club, you would have found them forming groups to consider and discuss his teaching. They had always believed that war was wrong, and now they were told it was foolish; they drew the conclusion that it was impossible. It ceased to interest them, it was no longer important. A nation which deliberately went to war would be committing not only a crime but a blunder, and who could believe that in the twentieth century this was possible?

And now all this is changed. The whole country has become a great camp; in the streets and in the trains, on the wide and open downs of the South, in the busy streets of Northumberland and Yorkshire mines and villages, on the great heaths and in the old Cathedral cities, it is the same; we see them everywhere. We see them, till one day the great camp is empty—we wake to find its occupants have gone—they have vanished like a mist in the silence of the night, and we hear of them next at Ypres, or La Bassée, Neuve Chapelle or Suvla Bay, and then they begin to return, those who return, the maimed, the halt and the blind. And these new soldiers are not like the old; they are in truth as yours are, a nation in arms. There is no class, there is no occupation which has not sent to them of its best; the foreman of the works, the retail trader, the clerk from the bank, who, a couple of years ago would as soon as thought of finding themselves at the South Pole as in the army—they are all there.

This change could not be produced in a day, least of all among a nation so stubborn and so opinionated as we are. The ideas and traditions of three centuries could not expire without a struggle. But all the time there has been working and maturing throughout the country a new growth which has with irresistible force spread until it has enveloped the whole nation. It did not act immediately and throughout with the same effect; to some it came at once, to others more slowly, there are some who even now are beginning for the first time to feel its full power. It was not at once apparent that this was not a war such as others that we have waged; the nature of the German menace was not at once revealed to all. The invasion of Belgium, the ill-treatment of the inhabitants, the terrible fate which fell on

the Belgian towns, the danger in France, the retreat of the British army, the raids on the coast, the submarine warfare, the coming of the Zeppelins, the sinking of the "Lusitania," the press campaign in America, the threat to Calais, the fall of Warsaw, the Dardanelles entanglement, the Armenian massacres, the new blow to Serbia, the horrors of the trench warfare, the use of poisonous gas, the sacrifice of our soldiers, the daring of the aviators, the return of men from the front, the stories of French heroism, endurance and skill—each of these has done its part, until now there are scarcely any left to whom the full truth has not been revealed, and as I write the last arrangements are being made to break down whatever residuum of carelessness or ignorance there may remain.

That all this has taken a year and more need not surprise us.

III.

Have you ever thought how this war came to us? We all knew that the condition of Europe was such that at any moment the summons might come to make common cause with France against some German aggression. We knew it, for we had been told it, but, in truth, there were few who gave much thought to it. Few of us are students of foreign affairs, most opined that the danger was, if not fictitious, at least exaggerated, and that anyhow it would pass over as such dangers have often passed over before. Those, and they were not many, who had taken the trouble to inform themselves more closely, understood that if the worst came true we were pledged to stand in with the full strength of our fleet; that was our main contribution; and, in addition, it was generally known that, supposing it were necessary, this would be supplemented by the despatch of an expeditionary force, the members of which had been agreed on at about 160,000 men, to strengthen the defence of France and of Belgium.

This was our commitment, it was one well within our power. This was our engagement, it was one we could honestly make, for it was one we could well fulfil. And how have we kept it? As to the sea and the navy no words are needed. Ask your mariners and your merchantmen who sail the seas almost as in the time of peace, to whom every continent and every sea is open; ask the Germans; go to Brest and Bordeaux; go to Kiel and Hamburg if you wish for the answer. The work has been done with a completeness and success for which there is no precedent. Six months after war began the German flag had absolutely disappeared from above the sea. In the greatest days of English maritime supremacy in the past nothing has happened like this. In the great war with France, after it had lasted 20 years, British merchant vessels regularly had to sail in convoys in order to have protection against French frigates and privateers. It is not necessary to labour the point as to the importance of this for the joint cause of the Allies. The result is that the armies can be moved about upon the sea and communications kept up with almost complete security. Nor is it necessary to dwell on the economic superiority; we have the whole world to draw upon,

while Germany sees approaching, slowly but inevitably, the end which must come when she is cut off from all resources except her own.

The very completeness with which the work has been done may cause misapprehension; it has been done well, but it has not been done easily. I will not dwell on the ships and lives that have been lost, they are indeed no inconsiderable number; what I should ask you to consider is how much the maintenance of this control over the sea means, in the drain on the wealth, the power and the manhood of the nation; it represents a sum of energy that, had it been thrown into the hazard of the battlefield, would long ago have brought the war to a decisive issue. And remember this drain is always there; it would have been different had the Germans ventured to bring matters to an issue; as it is, so long as their fleet remains in being, no relaxation is possible in the strict watch and ward which is maintained where the North Sea and the Atlantic meet.

If you wish to understand the alertness of mind and the vigour of execution which has been thrown into the work, consider for a moment the course of submarine warfare. Here the Germans have adopted a new weapon, the effect of which on naval war could not be foreseen. It was their belief that in it they had a means of so hampering the movements of British ships, whether merchantmen or men of war, that the control of the sea, or at least its advantages, would be lost. The danger was a very real one, had it been neglected, had there been a panic, as there well might have been, our defence might have broken down.

How precisely it happened even now we do not know; when, if ever, we do, it will be one of the most fascinating episodes of the war; the result we can see—the attack has so far completely failed. Many lives and ships have been lost, but the toll has not increased but diminished, and throughout the essential communications with France have been perfectly maintained. What we have to do is to realise all that lies behind this; the coolheadedness of the merchant sailors, who went about their work as cheerfully as in the days of peace, though they knew that every wave might hide the sudden and hidden death-stroke, the buoyant courage of the scouts of the sea, not only the ships of war, but the crews of the trawlers and mine-sweepers, and above all the fertile brains of those who devised and carried out the plans by which the danger was met.

I know how much the other allies, French and Japanese, have contributed to the success at sea, but, after all, the main burden was thrown on this country. It is on this country that falls the task, not only of manning the fleet, but also of keeping the constant supply of shell and torpedo, of building new ships and repairing old; this is our chief work, and we have done it.

On the seas we kept our troth, and what about the land? We pledged ourselves, in the case of necessity, to provide so many men, so many divisions. Did we keep our word? Surely we did so, not merely in the letter. Into the training, the equipment, and the organisation of this force, small though it may seem to you to be, we have put for 14 years all the experience

which had been learnt in the African campaign; many of us have watched with admiration the manner in which, under the influence of experience, and in that increase of intellectual energy which has since the beginning of the 20th century been a common quality in all European nations, this force has grown up; our non-commissioned officers, our regimental commanders, our generals, many of our soldiers, were men who had seen and studied war; the old traditions, for such indeed there had been, of aristocratic exclusiveness, of intellectual indolence were put aside; there have been days in the history of this country when the conduct of the soldiers in time of peace had caused the army to be looked on with dislike and disapproval by all the more self-respecting among the working men; this was all changed. The British soldier had always been in war an admirable fighter. He had not always been in peace an admirable citizen. For this old spirit there was no place under modern conditions; the soldier was treated as a gentleman and he became a gentleman, and as a school for discipline among officers and men alike the army had become such that the nation could be proud of it. It was animated with the keenest spirit of military efficiency.

There had been built up a small but highly effective force. It was literally our all, our only army; besides it we had only untrained or half-trained troops; and the soil of England, if it were gone, would be open to the invader. There might well have been some reluctance to stake on a single cast the whole of our immediate resources. Of this when the call came there was no symptom. We did not, as we well might have, wish to keep it in reserve and treasure and guard it. We threw it boldly, ungrudgingly into the breach, and what the risk was we were soon to learn. But France called and to the day it was on the spot, with the risk of annihilation, to take its place in strengthening the ally and in guarding Paris. With what success we know; the record of their deeds is written on the soil of France and Flanders, at Mons, the Aisne, the Marne, at Ypres and La Bassée, and in the countless German dead who fell in a vain attempt to break through the line of the British army.

IV.

This was the limit of our engagement; had we entered on the war in a narrow spirit of huckstering, had we stopped to chaffer and bargain, had we been in spirit a nation of shopkeepers, we might have paused here.

Recall what happened. Suddenly we were told, it was in August, 1914, but a few days after the war had begun, that a million men would be wanted. There was a moment of astonishment, among some almost of stupefaction; for such a demand there had been no warning, no word had ever been uttered by our political or military advisers to prepare us, no suggestion had ever been made by our allies. There was a moment's pause; and then the answer came, the men poured into the recruiting offices faster than they could be enrolled or housed, or fed or clothed or equipped. They came in such numbers that the supply had deliberately to be checked. But

the million were forthcoming, and then the demand was for a second and a third, and they are there, and now as I write the cry is again for more, to fill up the cruel ravages of battle, and once more the organisation is being completed to fill up the ranks. And so instead of our few divisions in France and Flanders we now have something little short of a million men. Russia was pressed by Turkey, at once was available a new force which was thrown straight at the heart of Turkey; and then began also the arduous march to Bagdad which is even now approaching its goal.

It is true that our efforts have not always been rewarded with the success we had hoped; it is not given to anyone to command success; but this you will find, that each disappointment has only served to call out fresh efforts; each miscalculation has only added to our resolution.

There has been much talk of ammunition; it has been suggested that here again England has been lax in the help that it has given. What are the real facts? Numbers and statistics, of course, cannot be given, but in a broad way we all know what has happened. Before the war our factories and workshops were arranged to provide the necessary supplies for an army of some 200,000 to 300,000 men, in addition to that required by the fleet. The latter is an important qualification. It has with us always been a necessary and inevitable requirement that the needs of the navy should come first. Their utmost demands for practice as well as for action had to be provided without stint. Dreadnoughts and cruisers, the hundreds of destroyers and submarines must not go in want; here there never has been any parcimony and grudging. And it may well have been that in consequence of this, as judged by the continental standard, the calculation of what the army might require was less than our soldiers could have wished. What happened as soon as war was declared? The active army was increased ten-fold, and at once the provision of ammunition was increased in the same proportion. There had to be 2,000,000 men, and at once arrangements were made that all that they might require when they were prepared to take the field should be ready for them. It was a work which might have appeared to be impossible, but it was done. The production of material and ammunition kept pace with the enrolment of the men.

Then it was discovered that all the estimates and calculations were wrong. The error was not ours alone. Under the new conditions of war munitions were required on a scale which the most foresighted tactician had never contemplated. If we had not foreseen this, neither had the French or the Germans. The result that became apparent during the early months of this year was that where in former wars one shell would have sufficed now a hundred were required. We had increased our output to meet the increased numbers; it was found that it must be again increased ten, fifty and a hundred fold. What happened then? Did the nation shrink from a burden thrown upon it immeasurably greater than the fantasy of any writer of fiction? We at once took stock of the situation. It is no slur upon the nation

that in dealing with the crisis the solution was not left silently in the hands of the Government; as I have explained before, this is not the way in which we do things. Parliament and the press could not be excluded from the deliberations, and the anxiety of the nation to do its all would not allow them to remain satisfied with mere tacit acquiescence in the decisions of those in authority. The crisis was such that it required new men and even grave constitutional changes. There were a few weeks of animated and even acrimonious discussion, but this was a matter of such urgency that in the handling of it there must be no scruples or reserve. The necessary changes were made, a new Department of State was created, and what has been the result? The whole of England has been converted into one great factory of munitions; to this the immense productive capacities have been turned, and from end to end of the country our workshops are now organised and our energies concentrated with the single endeavour upon this one purpose. Night and day the innumerable workshops are at work, not only at Sheffield and Glasgow and Barrow, but in every country town; in truth our ploughshares are being turned into swords.

Of our financial contributions I do not wish to say much, not that there is not much to say. You know well how the whole accumulated wealth of the nation has been freely, almost recklessly lavished on the war, and how it has been put at the service of the allies as well as of our own army. Wherever money was wanted it has been forthcoming, and perhaps for the first time in our history the Englishman, so jealous of taxation, has almost begged the Government not to spare him. You know, too, the generosity with which public taxation has been supplemented by private munificence—the endless funds and the millions of pounds that have been provided to meet the wants of those who have suffered by the war. Do not forget the Red Cross, the hospitals and ambulances sent out by that admirable organisation, the doctors and nurses who have hurried at once to the call of the sick and wounded. You know, too, how freely all that we could do has been offered not only to our people but to those of other nations—the help gladly lavished on the Belgians when we became the hosts of a nation; these things must not be forgotten, here the small household welcoming among them the strangers only because they were helpless and oppressed—there some country village, week by week, bringing their humble contribution to their common guests. News came of the tragedy of Serbia, when pestilence added its dire work to war and famine; at once men and women hurried off to brave the discomforts and dangers of hospital service in a wild and strange land, and by so doing it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that they saved the nation, many of them at the cost of their own lives, for they fell victims to the plague that they were combating.

If you will learn the truth go to the enemy. Among all the miscalculations on which their aggression was based none held a firmer base than the conviction that the Englishman would not fight himself, but only pay others to do so. It was a natural mistake in a nation that takes its knowledge of other countries from the accounts of the past written by their own historians,

and allows those partial and perverted pictures to stand between itself and the free and unbiassed interpretation of the world we live in. In truth much learning has made them mad, and never has it blinded them more than in their interpretations of France and of England. You can read for yourself those marvellous works of the professors in which to an astonished world was revealed for the first time in its full malignity the soul of Modern Germany, and always you will find the same refrain that on land England might be neglected, for the Englishman would not sacrifice himself for his country; we have the official statement of the German Embassy that the few divisions that England could contribute would make no difference among the great armies that would be engaged. Would they say that now?

V.

Now you will note that all this has been done by voluntary service, no man has gone to battle but of his own free will. This is indeed the note of our time, the voluntary offering of life and wealth and leisure; of all but happiness, for the best happiness is found in this offering. And this is no sign, as some would have it, of a want of manly spirit or public feeling; rather it is the perpetuation of a great national ideal, an ideal consecrated by 500 years of glorious history; an ideal that will never be forgotten or disowned, for it is perpetuated by the words which as on this day 500 years ago Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Henry on the field of Agincourt,

“He which hath no stomach to this fight
Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse
We would not die in that man’s company
Who fears his fellowship to die with us.”

Why have these millions gone to war? Not from any love of fighting, for most of them hate it; it is because there is among them something of the spirit of the knight-errant. Look at the beginning of the war. For what was it that the soldier at least in appearance fought? For the defence of Belgium and of France and the command of the road to India; it was for honour, for empire, for humanity; for everything except himself and his home. These are things for which you cannot force men to fight, but they are causes for which you can make the supreme appeal; you can say to a man: “Honour calls you and duty, and the cry of the oppressed and the stricken towns of Flanders, and the ruined homes of France, the freedom of the nations and the glories of the Empire.” This you can say but it must always remain his own decision how he will answer; it must remain free to him to say: “My own family and children are more to me.” This was the call and we have seen what, as a matter of fact, the answer was; it was an unprecedented offer of voluntary service made as it could have been made in no other nation.

This question of what is called “voluntary” or “compulsory” service is one which is much discussed among us: in the discussion much has been said on both sides which had better been left unsaid, but do not be misled by this; if the one party accuses the other of slackness and indifference, if the other speaks of

intrigues and subordination of national ends to party ends, this is merely the ordinary method in which political discussion is carried on in this and every other nation. The real truth is that both sides are completely at one in this, that they are anxious to bring the full strength of the country into the war; how to do so is a question of very real difficulty; it is a matter both of numbers and organisation; how will the best results be attained? Will it be by each individual using his own judgment as to the part which he can best play, or will it be by a general act of voluntary self-surrender, the result of which would be to leave the decision to the Government. This is a matter in which every man is concerned and in which, for such is our way, every man wishes publicly to state his own views. It is one on which the wisest may find it difficult to give an opinion, but of this you may rest assured that that which will influence the decision of the nation is the best means of attaining success in the war; if it becomes clear that for this purpose national service is necessary it will be adopted and will be accepted, but it will not be adopted until it is shown to be necessary.

It will not be adopted until it is necessary and for a very sound reason. The system of compulsory service can only be used in a defensive war and in a war fought directly for the protection of the soil of the country. None know this so well as the Germans. Observe with what extreme care now as in 1870 the efforts of their diplomacy were entirely directed to making it appear that the war was forced upon them, and that it was being fought for the defence of the country against unprovoked attack. The one object of all the publications of the German Government was to persuade the people that what they were doing was simply to protect German soil against a Russian invasion. For this purpose there was no misrepresentation too great or too small.

For the Allies too it was a defensive war, but England was in appearance defending not herself but others; I say in appearance; as a matter of fact from the very first day the danger to England though more remote has been greater than that to either France or Germany; but defeat alone, or the prospect of defeat, would show the truth.

This distinction between war for the defence of the country and war for others or for the Empire is a vital one. It is the principle on which the Empire has been built. The Empire is the voluntary creation of the free and uncoerced efforts of Englishmen. As it has been created so it must be maintained. This is no accidental and transitory fact. You cannot compel a man to lay down his life that the flag of England may fly over the mountains of Hindustan or the veldt of South Africa. If English people wish these distant parts of the earth to remain under the English flag they must be willing voluntarily and individually to come forward to defend them. It is because generally sufficient have been willing to do so that the English rule has always extended. If they were not, then it would cease, and it would be right that it should cease. There is one palmary instance of this. Have you ever considered the real reason why

the American colonies were lost? It was that the Government could not find the Englishmen willing to fight to maintain them, they had to depend on the services of German mercenaries. Compare the war of American independence with the South African war, what is the essential difference? In the latter case hundreds of thousands of men of every rank in life offered their services as soon as the news of the first defeats came.

And this is the reason why the voluntary service of Englishmen at home is met by the voluntary co-operation of Englishmen beyond the seas. It is the very life of the Empire that it is maintained by this system under which the soldier from Yorkshire or Glasgow or Cork meets in absolute equality his comrade from Montreal or Melbourne or Christchurch or from the Punjab and Oude. It is this very spirit of voluntary co-operation that we are fighting to defend as against the German system, which rightly used for the defence of the homeland is doomed to failure as soon as it is deliberately applied to foreign conquest.

If the German dreams of expansion in Africa and Asia were realised the first result would be that the whole military organisation of the Empire would be altered; the German peasant or tradesman, who willingly obeys the call to service so long as he can be persuaded that the Fatherland is in danger, would be found no longer a willing instrument if he became aware that his services were really required to defend the Bagdad Railway or the distant settlements on the Congo or the Zambesi.

There is one condition alone on which this principle of voluntary service can be changed, and that is when it becomes directly apparent that the struggle in Europe is in truth for the protection of the soil of England as much as if it were being fought on our own fields. That this is the case takes long to penetrate among the people. Our very successes have obscured it; had the Germans advanced to Calais and clearly to every eye threatened the soil of Kent across the narrow seas then the real verity would have been more clearly disclosed. It has always been a constitutional principle that in case of an invasion of the realm, the King had the right to call on the services of the whole people to defend the soil of England; this is, and must be, in every nation an unalterable principle, and it is a necessary correlative to the truth that foreign service is voluntary. Owing to the nature of our history, it is a principle that has fallen into abeyance; our army has been used entirely for foreign service; the army required for home defence has almost ceased to exist. We have had proposals to restore it. There are many who for years past have advocated the establishment of such a force in which all should be required to serve. But observe that had this proposal been adopted, had we had a system of compulsory training something on the Swiss model, this would not in itself and alone have met the needs of the present crisis. This force would not have been available for service abroad, it would not have provided an army for the defence of Serbia or the attack on the Dardanelles; all that it would have done would have been to ensure that those who volunteered for foreign service should have had some preliminary training. Compulsory training has

been introduced in Australia; this has nothing to do with the enlistment of those admirable troops who are now fighting in Gallipoli.

We may sum up the matter by saying that compulsory service cannot be used to ensure victory, but only to avoid defeat, for while victory would mean the extension of the power and influence of the Empire abroad, defeat would mean that the soil of England would be exposed to invasion.

VI.

I do not wish to paint too rosy a picture, it would be foolish and absurd to pretend that there were no weaknesses among us, no dark spots; among none of the nations engaged in war would this be true. France has her internal troubles to meet, and so has Germany, so to a greater extent have Italy and Russia. We hear less of them; for in no other country is the State administered by public opinion as it is in England, and especially in Germany all public discussion of the internal situation is suppressed. In every class here and elsewhere there is a residuum who do not come up to the mark—sometimes perhaps, from what we may call deliberate vice, more often from a certain slackness of will, sluggishness of intellect. There are no doubt some idle rich who care only for the continuance of their habitual self-indulgence; others, perhaps, there are who have not scrupled to take a full advantage of the commercial situation created by the war; we know at least that this has happened in other countries; if it has happened in England their desires have been quickly frustrated. A few of the working class have continued to subordinate the public interest to their continual struggle with their employers; they have been disowned by all their appointed leaders and the vast majority of their comrades.

I do not contend that the conduct of the war has throughout been such as to meet the wishes of the people. It is, I think, a fair criticism that in many matters we at first acted with undue caution, and that those in authority were slow to put off habits acquired during the long years of peace. We should often have liked things to have moved more quickly; I think they could have been managed with more expedition, but after all, we have nothing to reproach ourselves with in the fact that our institutions were framed for peace and not for the conduct of war. It is open to anyone to point out our want of preparation, and it would be easy to frame an indictment against those who had not warned the nation of the dangers that were impending. We have deliberately refused to do so; this is no time for recrimination; our interest at the moment is with the present and not with the past. All this, however, serves only to bring into stronger relief the determination of the people and the Government alike to carry on the war with the fullest determination that these inevitable difficulties should be overcome. During the last sixteen months many great things have been done. We have seen France throwing aside those weaknesses and dissension which had for so long distressed her warmest friends; we have seen in

Germany an unparalleled exhibition of the subordination of the nation to the desires of the Government; we have seen the Russian peasants untouched by doubt and undeterred by defeat, struggling against the predominance of German equipment; we have seen the King and people of the Belgians willing to sacrifice all but honour, and now we see the Serbian nation, worthy inheritors of the spirit of Leonidas and Bruce, maintaining to the last the freedom of their native land, but I think that when the accounts are closed nothing will be found more remarkable, more unexpected, and more permanent than the awakening of the English nation.

Yours sincerely,

J. W. HEADLAM.

October 25 (St. Crispin's Day), 1915.

Printed in Great Britain.

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